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ABSTRACT

Papers presented at the City University of New York's English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) Council conference on the relationship between text and context in college second language instruction include the following: "Reading Research: New Directions and Implications for ESL" (M. Trika Smith-Burke); "Two ESL Readers: Case Studies of Reading Comprehension Strategies" (Ellen L. Block); "Reading, an Essential Part of the Writing Process" (Gay Brookes, Martha Clark Cummings, Jean Withrow); "Easy Doesn't Do It: Introducing ESL Readers to 'Real English'" (Nancy Erber Cadet); "Aesopic Double 'Takeoutables'" (Mary J. Regan); "Two Walks: Ways of Presenting Poetry" (Jean McConochie); "Vygotsky's Theory of Cognitive Processing: A Possible Grounding for Second Language Acquisition Research" (Gay N. Washburn); "Vygotskian Theory and Language Testing" (Jack Gantzer); "Person to Person: Structured Conversations between ESL Students and Native Speakers" (Carol Montgomery); and "A Writer's Strategy for Talkers: The Oral Journal" (Sally Mettler). (MSE)

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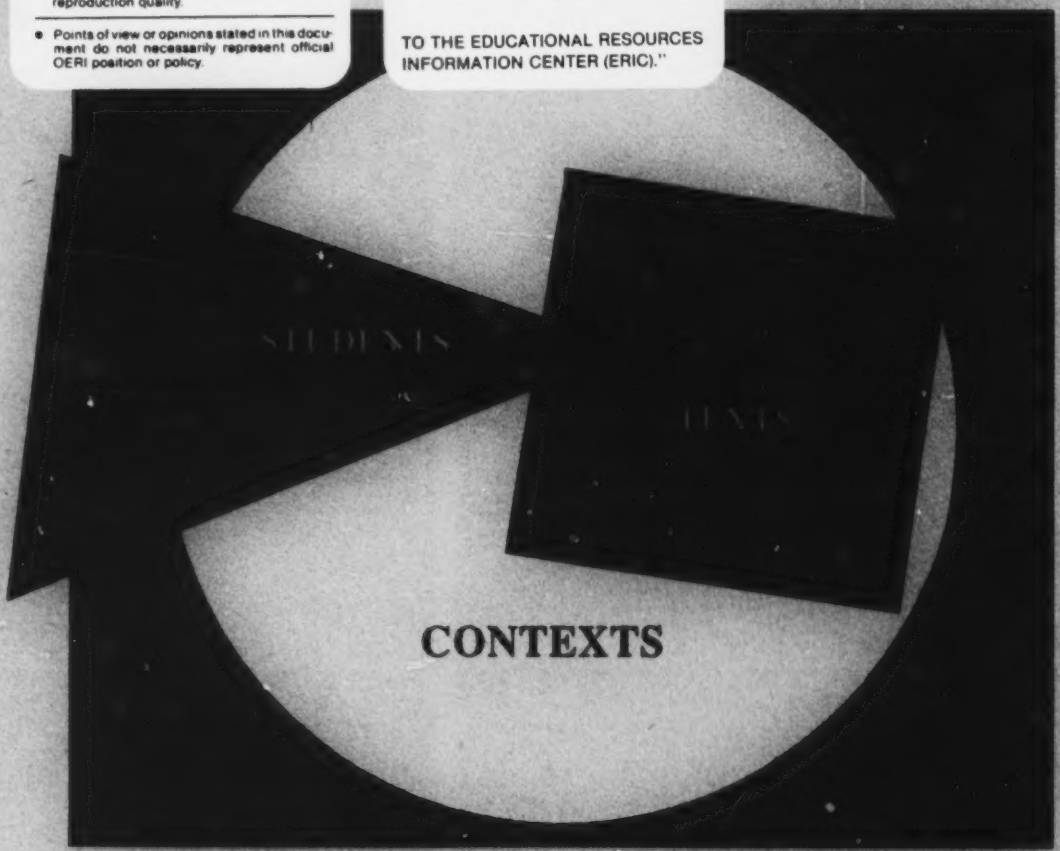

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN ESL INSTRUCTION

SELECTED PAPERS FROM THE 1986 CUNY ESL COUNCIL CONFERENCE

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RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN ESL INSTRUCTION

Selected Papers from the 1986
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PREFACE

A chapter in a student's textbook and a researcher's report look quite different, even when they convey much of the same information. A politician's speech and a report of it in the next day's newspaper contain many of the same facts, yet no one would say that they are the same. What makes the textbook and the research report, the speech and the newspaper account different is not the information they contain but their contexts--the audience that reads or hears the texts and the purposes for which they were written. While this interdependence of text and context may seem obvious, its application to language instruction has not been extensive.

The relationship between text and context in college ESL instruction was the theme of the 1986 CUNY ESL Conference. The subject proved to be multifaceted, as the papers presented in this volume reveal. Included here are explorations of how readers, writers, and listeners construct meaning from written and oral texts--from tapes to poetry, "real" English to fables; inventive ways to evaluate students' comprehension of both oral and written texts; and research reports and reviews that invite further study and application.

Many of these explorations focus more specifically on the instructor's need to understand the contexts--background, academic goals, learning processes--that college ESL students themselves bring to the classroom. Several contributors urge further research and suggest new theoretical models, offering insights drawn from reading comprehension studies and cognitive psychology. Others describe classroom-as-laboratory approaches to refining and revising established teaching models. The classroom is the focus for those contributors who stress the importance of assigning ESL students unadapted texts--newspapers, classics, poetry, "reading of all kinds"--and of helping them to develop their analytical skills in preparation for college-level studies. The common goal of all of these contributors, of course, is to teach the college ESL student more effectively by employing what is known and what is being learned through research and practice.

We have enjoyed a close, second (third and fourth) look at the fine conference presentations in compiling this volume. We hope you do, too.

We wish to thank the University's Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) for supporting this annual edition of papers from the CUNY ESL Council conferences. We owe particular thanks to Tulin Duda and Virginia Slaughter of the OAA's Instructional Resource Center, which co-sponsors the conferences, for seeing this project through to completion. The Center's Director, Dean Harvey S. Wiener, has advised and supported us in the final stages of production. Dean Barbara Gonzales, to whom we are especially grateful, encouraged this publication from the beginning and advised us along the way. Her efforts were essential, and we thank her.

--Jack Gantzer and Gay Brookes

READING RESEARCH: NEW DIRECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ESL

M. TRIKA SMITH-BURKE

Ten years ago, few reading researchers were interested in comprehension research as we know it today. Readability studies using the cloze technique were very popular. The unit of analysis was the sentence; syntactic processing was the major concern. Only the daring contemplated the paragraph. Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith were among the few who recognized the reader's role in the reading process. Bonnie Meyer's (1975) initial study of the effect of rhetorical structure on recall was considered quite innovative.

The larger research community has since recognized that the background brought to reading is, in several ways, crucial to comprehension. More research remains to be done on the processes and problems of ESL readers. Yet three major findings on reading comprehension, though arrived at through first language research, are particularly significant toward an understanding of the problems ESL readers often encounter: namely, (1) background knowledge is strongly related to comprehension; (2) reading comprehension involves the active construction of meaning; and (3) the recognition of text structure facilitates comprehension. And the methods first language researchers/teachers have developed to strengthen readers' abilities in these areas are equally useful in the ESL classroom.

Background Knowledge and Comprehension

Research from the Center for the Study of Reading suggests that knowledge is organized in hierarchical schemes or plans, which are called to mind by the information read in a text. Prior knowledge allows the reader to infuse the print with meaning and, thereby, to "comprehend" the text (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). Specifically, background knowledge helps the reader in three ways.

First, background knowledge enables the reader to elaborate the text where it is not explicit in order to draw inferences. Background knowledge can fill in the missing information and/or logical connections which the author has either intentionally or unintentionally excluded. Proficient readers are also able to use the information in the text to analyze, synthesize, or evaluate its content (Warren, Nicholas, & Trabasso, 1979).

Second, background knowledge helps a reader to identify what is important in the text. It is far easier to summarize a passage, for example, if one has some knowledge of its subject. The reader who is familiar with a text topic also remembers the information more easily, although the same reader often is unable to

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distinguish information contained in the text from previously held knowledge (Steffenson, Joag-Dev, & Anderson, 1979).

Finally, readers' background knowledge provides a base for predicting content and monitoring or checking comprehension (Brown, 1982; Goodman, 1970). Good readers consistently use knowledge to predict what is coming next in the text. Knowledge enables them to monitor their comprehension for textual consistency, logic, and truth (Baker & Brown, 1984)--to ask if the text makes sense (Goodman, 1970).

The importance of background knowledge to the reading comprehension of ESL students cannot be underestimated. One study that has illustrated this is an examination of cross-cultural differences in the comprehension of two passages, one on an American wedding and the other on an East Indian wedding (Steffenson, Joag-Dev, and Anderson, 1979). Weddings were chosen as a topic because they occur in radically different cultural settings; the two passages ensured that each reader would be familiar with one of those settings. A group of Indian and a group of American students were asked to read and recall the two passages and to answer five probe questions. Reading time, amount of recall, and important ideas per passage were measured. Also analyzed were reader modifications of the text in terms of elaborations and distortions.

Both groups read the familiar passage faster and recalled more information from it. Distortions in recalling the nonnative passage and answering questions about it reflected the culture of the reader, as the responses to the following section of the American passage reveal:

> *Did you know that Pam was going to wear her grandmother's wedding dress? That gave her something that was old, and borrowed, too. It was made of lace over satin with very large puff sleeves, and looked absolutely charming on her. The front was decorated with seed pearls* (pp. 20-21).

An American student, familiar with the elaborate rituals that surround the bride and the ceremony in this country, thought this passage signified "carrying on the tradition of wearing the family gown" (p. 21). According to an Indian student, however, "She was looking alright except the dress was too old and out of fashion."

To properly understand the passage on an Indian wedding, it was helpful to know that social status is emphasized in Indian marriages, and that financial negotiations occur between the two families before the wedding. One American reader interpreted an "agreement about the gifts to be given to the in-laws" in the passage as "an exchange of gifts" rather than a negotiated settlement (p. 21). Other American students tended to be vague and sketchy in their recall of this part of the Indian passage. The Indian readers, on the other hand, went into great detail on this matter and even inferred that the gifts were modest, a point that is not made in the passage. One Indian subject recalled the giving of a dowry, a common practice in India, although there was no mention of this in the passage.

Some clear implications of the study by Steffenson et al. for teaching students from culturally different backgrounds are (1) the need to elicit what students know

before giving a reading assignment; (2) the need to discuss cultural concepts that are prerequisites to understanding the assignment, perhaps through comparison and contrast of the customs and/or experiences of the students in the class; and (3) the importance of eliciting *how* each individual arrived at his or her interpretation--either from information in the text or from background knowledge and experience.

PREP: A Classroom Application. Judith Langer (1982; 1984) has conducted several studies on a teaching method known as the PREP (Pre-Reading Plan), which is based on background-knowledge research. The method would be as useful in the ESL classroom as it is with first language learners.

The two-fold purpose of PREP is to elicit and develop what students know about a key topic in a reading assignment and to help teachers diagnose which students have a lot, some, or little knowledge of the topic. The procedure involves three steps:

1. To evoke background knowledge, the teacher displays a word or a picture of a critical concept in the reading assignment on the blackboard and asks, "What does the word _____ (or this picture) remind you of? Tell me everything you think of." The teacher jots down "reminders" of the elicited responses on the board.

2. To encourage students to reflect on what they have said and on what they know about the topic--that is, to become more aware of their knowledge--the teacher then asks, "What made you think of _____?" Students reconsider their responses and give reasons for making them. All responses are accepted.

3. To help students integrate and possibly form new concepts based on the discussion, the teacher finally asks, "After our discussion, do you have any new ideas about this topic? Can you put any of the ideas on the board together in a new way?"

PREP is particularly useful in classes of students with varying levels of prior knowledge, because less knowledgeable students often benefit from the discussion that takes place. Also, PREP is a good classroom icebreaker: unlike, for instance, questions about the meaning of a word, this exercise is nonjudgmental, requiring students to respond only with what they know.

Also, PREP enables the teacher to begin to assess each student's knowledge base. According to Langer's analysis, students who have a lot of knowledge tend to give very advanced definitional responses, analogies, or relationships among concepts. Students with some knowledge tend to give incidents or attributes. Their use of terms tends to be less defined, more global and vague. Students who have very little knowledge of the topic will give idiosyncratic responses, the meaning of morphemes or sound-alikes. Langer suggests that those who have a lot of knowledge are ready to read the text independently; those with some knowledge are

likely to need some guidance during the reading; those with little knowledge probably are not ready to read the text without serious concept building.

Comprehension as the Active Construction of Meaning

The significance of background knowledge plays a large role in the second major finding of recent reading research. Contradicting an earlier notion of reading as a passive, receptive process, recent research indicates that readers *construct* a message, using the cues on the page that trigger background knowledge (Adams & Bruce, 1982). The reader monitors the construction according to his or her purpose for reading (Adams & Collins, 1979). Because reading involves prediction and the active construction of meaning, monitoring must occur not just at word or sentence level but also at the passage level (Collins & Smith, 1980).

Reciprocal Teaching: A Classroom Application. Reciprocal Teaching is a technique developed by Anne Marie Palinscar and Ann Brown (1982; in press) that encourages students to develop strategies with which to monitor how they construct meaning from a text. Students are taught four comprehension strategies--summarizing, questioning, monitoring for difficulty, and predicting--through active teacher modeling.

Modeling is a critical part of Reciprocal Teaching. Instructors serve as models who not only show students what to do, but also describe the mental processes involved in carrying out a strategy. For example, when modeling how to ask questions (which would evoke a summary or main idea statement), the teachers also point out how they thought of the question and why they thought it was a good question.

Students then try the strategy themselves, and their instructor gives them feedback through modeling if they have difficulty. The four-step process is finally handed over entirely to the students for independent practice. They work in small groups so that discussion can facilitate learning. Eventually, the students learn to construct a summary, to be active questioners and predictors, and to monitor their understanding.

Text Structure and Comprehension and Recall

The third major finding of reading research is based on an easily overlooked kind of prior knowledge: familiarity with similar texts. Prior experience with similar structures enables the reader to grasp the structure of a text and to group the information so that it can be remembered more easily (Meyer & Rice, 1984). One implication of this finding is that educators need to choose the texts they use carefully. Many junior high and high school textbooks in the sciences and social sciences, for example, lack coherent structure and elaboration of ideas (Armbruster & Anderson, 1981). It is no wonder that students have difficulty comprehending and remembering information from these "inconsiderate" texts.

Questioning and Reading/Writing Strategies: Classroom Applications. Teachers can facilitate comprehension and recall by asking good, logical, and sequential questions based on a text's structure (Smith-Burke & Ringler, 1986). Comprehension questions in textbook manuals typically focus on details and often do not follow the structure of the text in a logical way. Lenore Ringler and I have found systematic questioning to be quite effective, as have researchers at the LRDC in Pittsburgh. Because the method enables students actively to discover the structure of a text, they are better able to internalize this knowledge than if it had been spelled out for them.

The questioning strategy can be combined with a reading/writing strategy called "reading like a writer," suggested by both Calkins (1986) and Smith (1982). When students are required to write in a particular form, a reading lesson based on good materials written in that form provides a model for discussion. It is important to provide more than one example so that students can see that authors use variations of a structure for a particular purpose. This technique also heightens students' awareness of structure.

Suggestions for Further Research and Applications

There are undoubtedly any number of other ways in which an understanding of the processes involved in reading comprehension can enhance our ability to help students, both native and nonnative, learn to read proficiently. However, to help students from different cultures become "literate," we also need to increase our own "background knowledge" about the functions of reading in our students' communities, and about how literacy is or is not woven into the social fabric of their lives. We need to know, for example, that a Hawaiian student comes to us from a culture in which one learns how to do something by apprenticing for an expert, not by seeking a manual or a book on the subject.

Depending on the role of literacy in our life experiences and home and community, we develop knowledge and attitudes toward literacy. A South African student, sharing her attitudes toward reading and writing with my class, stated that she hates to read textbooks because they remind her of the textbooks she read as a child, which to her represented the bias of a repressive and cruel governmental system. However, she loves to write and is already a published poet and author. For her, writing symbolizes the voice of freedom.

As researchers, we need not only to understand what the functions of literacy are in a multicultural setting, but also to know how to structure educational experiences in such a way that students can learn new literacy functions, if they wish to. Many high school and college students seem unfamiliar, for example, with the informational function of texts, a function that is crucial to their academic progress. Ellen Block (1985), studying the reading processes of nonnative college students, defined a group of "nonintegrating" readers, who tended to make personal associations and stray from the author's purpose. [See Ellen Block's summary of this study on p. 7, below.--Eds.] Perl (1978) found that the community college students she studied had great difficulty developing the distanced, informational style of college writing.

Amanda Branscombe and Shirley Brice Heath (1985) also realized that Branscombe's high school students were unfamiliar with the informational and persuasive functions of academic discourse. They designed a literacy curriculum of reading and writing activities that allowed students to reflect on their worlds, collect data, and make a transition from personal to third person writing. These students became ethnographers under the tutelage of Heath and Branscombe. They read *Ways with Words* (Heath, 1983) to better understand how to write field notes and interpret them. They wrote and read for real communicative purposes and got feedback on their writing.

For me, the culmination of the Heath-Branscombe project's success was a presentation at the National Reading Conference by Cassandra Pitts, one of Amanda Branscombe's students. Now in community college and doing very well, Cassandra was once considered mentally retarded. Using her own experiences in the project as illustrations, she gave one of the best presentations on the ethnography of communication at the conference. Cassandra particularly stressed the need to have a community of readers and writers to support literacy development, and the need to talk about the process, not just the product.

Like Amanda Branscombe, we as teachers can learn from our students by reading and writing together with them.

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TWO ESL READERS: CASE STUDIES OF READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

ELLEN L. BLOCK

The ability to read fluently and analytically is essential for success in college, and the inadequate development of this ability often hinders college ESL students. To help them we need to know more than we presently do about the problems that adults have when they read, and about the processes they use to understand. Our lack of knowledge largely results from the fact that reading has in general been examined indirectly. That is, most evaluations and research have concentrated on assessing what readers have understood *after* they read. To find out what such methods have not revealed--the things readers do or fail to do as they develop their versions of the text--I studied the reading processes individual nonproficient readers employ (Block, 1985).

I asked nine nonproficient readers (three native speakers of Spanish, three native speakers of Chinese, and three native speakers of English) to read two passages from *The Psychology of Being Human* (Rubin & McNeil, 1981). (The quotes reported here are drawn from responses to one of these passages, "Noise Pollution.") To observe the reading processes of these readers, I used *think-aloud* protocols (Newell & Simon, 1972; see also, Afflerbach & Johnston, 1984, and Ericsson & Simon, 1980). In this method of self-report, readers verbalize their thoughts and behaviors to the best of their ability. I asked the participants to report as many of their thoughts and internal actions as they could after they had silently read each paragraph of the text. When they finished reading they were permitted to review the text. I then asked them to retell as much of the passage as they could remember (without looking at the text). Finally, they answered 20 multiple-choice questions about the passage. Thus, both the product and the process of their reading was assessed.

Shu Fen and Jessie are typical of the participants in the study. Both failed the City University of New York (CUNY) writing assessment and reading assessment tests. (These tests are given throughout the University to incoming freshmen to determine placement and proficiency.) Both are fairly fluent in English; both attended bilingual classes in high school but, after one year, asked to be placed in mainstream classes; both are first generation college students and first generation immigrants.

Shu Fen is a native speaker of Chinese who came to the United States from Taiwan at the age of 16, when she was in the tenth grade. Initially, Shu Fen received a 19, or a scaled score of 7, on the CUNY Reading Assessment Test (CRAT; a scaled score of 12 is passing), 3 on the CUNY Writing Assessment Test

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(CWAT; 4 is passing), and a passing score of 39 on the CUNY Mathematics Assessment Test (CMAT). She sees a value in reading: "Because when you talk to your friends and they talk about some authors and you don't know them, then you really can't talk with them."

Jessie is a native speaker of Spanish who came to the United States from the Dominican Republic at the age of 14, when she was in the ninth grade. Her initial scores were 16 (a scaled score of 5) on the CRAT, 5 on the CWAT, and 10 on the CMAT. She has confidence in her ability to learn and likes to read, although she says that she prefers to read in Spanish "because it's easier."

Shu Fen and Jessie used different approaches when reading the psychology textbook passage. Shu Fen looked objectively at the text, questioned words, guessed meanings, and drew conclusions. She reviewed the information in each paragraph, "recycling" it in a kind of summary which synthesized and distilled information. She questioned what she read, monitored her understanding, and evaluated the information in the passage. Most importantly, her responses reveal that she consistently and successfully related information in earlier paragraphs with that in later paragraphs. For example, after reading the penultimate paragraph in the text, she linked the previous four paragraphs with a single sentence: "All these are affected by uncontrollable noise." When she finished reading and responding to the passage, she spontaneously returned to the information at the beginning and tried to tie together the entire text.

Jessie, on the other hand, reacted emotionally to the text, painting pictures, telling stories, and relating information to her own experiences. She responded to details more often than to main points. She neither evaluated the content nor synthesized the information in the text. After reading one paragraph, for example, she responded with a personal association and did not discuss the information in the text: "Forget it, I have a headache, you know, after the party . . . the music is still there." After more such comments, she finally did paraphrase the paragraph, but then offered yet another personal association:

> *A lot of noise can cause severe hearing loss. I think that when a person decide to go to a campus university, it's because he want to get more concentrated in his study. He don't want to listen to all the noise that sometime make you feel like if you going crazy, like everything is blowing up, you know. . . .*

I call Shu Fen an Integrator and Jessie a Nonintegrator. The strategies they used suggest that each was reading for a different purpose--Shu Fen to gather information, Jessie to relate information to her own life. Their scores on several selected measures also reveal differences in performance. Their multiple-choice test scores were roughly equal, with Shu Fen receiving an 80 and Jessie a 75. Greater differences emerged when they were asked to retell what they had read. Whereas Shu Fen stated the thesis, three main ideas, and six details, Jessie did not state the thesis, named only one main idea, and no details. At semester's end, Shu Fen progressed from a scaled score of 7 to a scaled score of 11 on the CRAT, while Jessie's scaled score upon retesting remained at 5. Shu Fen's grade point average was 3.62 (B+); Jessie's was 1.48 (D+). Shu Fen passed her writing course; Jessie did not. In other words, the Integrator was able to improve her test performance

during one semester and had a positive grade point average; the Nonintegrator's test score stayed at the same level and her grade point average was low.

A causal relation between the use of particular strategies and successful academic performance has yet to be established. However, the results of this study suggest some applications to the classroom. Readers who are aware of the resources they have for understanding their reading--and the strategies they lack--are better readers. Think-alouds seem to be effective tools for encouraging readers to develop this awareness. Some of the readers in this study commented on how much they had learned about reading. In fact, these readers had "taught" themselves; there had been no direct instruction.

Teachers might promote student awareness of monitoring by asking pairs of learners to talk to each other first about what they understood and did not understand, and then discussing what action they took when they didn't understand. This sharing would promote awareness while developing new resources. Another way to increase strategic resources is to have teachers serve as models of competent readers by "thinking aloud" as the class reads some text. Finally, students might "write aloud," keeping process journals of their responses to material read.

The wide-range differences among adult readers make prepackaged solutions to imagined reading problems impractical. When readers become aware of their problems, they also seem to find ways to solve them.

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READING, AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE WRITING PROCESS

GAY BROOKES, MARTHA CLARK CUMMINGS,
AND JEAN WITHROW

> *Read, read, read. Read everything--trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You'll absorb it. Then write. If it is good, you'll find out. If it's not, throw it out the window.*
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> --William Faulkner

We teach in programs that require students to pass a written test before they enter a higher level of ESL or regular college English classes. For quite some time, we enthusiastically focused our classes on the process of writing, believing that people learn to write by writing. In our enthusiasm for teaching the writing process, however, we unwittingly separated writing from reading.

Yet by watching our students write and talking to them about it, and by reading what researchers and writers (like Faulkner) have learned about the interconnectedness of reading and writing, we have gradually become aware that reading is vitally important to the development of writing ability--that reading and writing are, in fact, similar processes.

Kenneth and Yetta Goodman believe that "people not only learn to read by reading and write by writing but they also learn to read by writing and write by reading" (1983, p. 592). Frank Smith maintains that a child "must read like a writer, in order to learn how to write like a writer. The intricate complexity of a writer's knowledge cannot be acquired in any other way" (1983, p. 562).

If this is true for people learning to write in their first language, surely it is just as true for students learning to write in a second language--a logical extension that leads Krashen (1984, p. 20) to review the literature on what makes people competent writers:

> *Writing competence, it is hypothesized, comes only from large amounts of self-motivated reading for interest and/or pleasure. It is acquired subconsciously; readers are unaware they are acquiring writing competence while they are reading, and are unaware of this accomplishment after acquisition has taken place. It is reading that gives the writer the feel for the look and texture of reader-based prose.*

One of us (Brookes) interviewed ESL students, both in classes that connected reading and writing and in classes that did not, about what helped them learn to write. Twenty-five out of 30 students volunteered that reading was helpful. Reading helped them, in their own words, to "absorb style and sentence structure" and to acquire "vocabulary," "idioms," "models," and "ways to express" themselves. One student "decided to put French aside [for] English novels"; another found that reading "gives the idea for main ideas."

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Tierney and Pearson (1983), among others, maintain that reading, like writing, is an act of composition. Both consist of composing meaning. A writer puts her thoughts into words on the page with the intention of communicating a message to a reader, hoping the reader will be able to interpret the meaning behind the words. The reader tries to do just that, relying on the words on the page, but also relying on whatever background experience she brings to the task. In other words, "The reader is composing personal meaning from the text, seeking to see how the message fits into, or adds to, what he or she already knows" (Tway, 1985, p. 3).

With the words of these experts and some of our students in mind, we have recently increased the amount of reading we have our students do in ESL writing classes. By reading we mean reading of all kinds--other students' writing, the teacher's writing, newspapers, essays, short stories, novels. This increase in reading has had a positive effect on our students' writing. Our students

(1) have more to write about because they can use what they read as a springboard for their own writing;

(2) show increased ability to abstract and generalize personal experiences in their writing because they see their relationship to the world they read about--they come to recognize shared or similar concerns, problems, experiences;

(3) become better able to interact with their own and others' texts because they work at comprehending and composing meaning from the texts they read and from the texts they write;

(4) strengthen their writing processes because they begin to read as writers--absorbing, noticing, anticipating, and collaborating with the author as they read.

Using Reading in the Writing Class

Among the reading-writing activities that we have found help get these beneficial results is one that requires students to read a short passage and to respond to it in writing using the following questions as guidelines: (1) What do you perceive in what you read? (2) How do you feel about what you see? (3) What associations (thoughts, feelings) follow?

Why use these particular questions? David Bleich (1975), who poses them, and Anthony Petrosky (1982), who uses and describes them, offer the following rationale: When we perceive something for the first time, we react with our bodies first. We literally feel things about what we perceive. Then we respond affectively, with our emotions. Our emotions set off a reaction inside us, reminding us of our past experiences. Bleich and Petrosky insist that there is no one correct interpretation of a text, only one that is agreed upon. They believe that each reader brings her own past experience and knowledge of the world to a piece of writing and hence interprets it differently. How we understand what we are reading depends on what

our lives have been like, what is happening to us right now, and what mood we are in at the moment of reading.

An anecdote illustrates this point: Several years ago there was a series on public television called "Writers in America" which contained interviews and readings by several prominent American writers, one of whom was Eudora Welty. After she had been interviewed, Eudora Welty sat down in a rocking chair and began to read her well-known story, "Why I Live at the P.O." In the middle of a particularly beautiful sentence she interrupted herself and, looking directly into the camera, said, "Isn't that lovely?" She read the sentence again, but this time when she looked up she was puzzled. "But I wonder what I meant by it," she said.

Reading in the writing process classroom shows students that reading is not only what Iser (1978) calls "consistency building" but also a matter of tolerating uncertainty and allowing for what he calls "a wandering viewpoint," a continually changing perspective on the first interpretation they find. Beginning writers, instead of grappling to understand what they are writing about, opt for what Anne Berthoff calls "premature closure." They can learn instead to enjoy the ambiguity of their changing response to the text they are either reading or writing.

Reading and Writing as Self Discovery. In a writing class we read a text closely to find out who we are. Sharing is an important part of this exercise. Cooper, Evans, and Robertson (1985) suggest that students write responses to texts before they are discussed in class rather than after, and that they first discuss their responses in small groups. We recommend that the teacher also write responses to texts and share them with the students. Newkirk (1984) points out that just as writing teachers have to demystify the writing process by composing in public, showing students that they do not know what they are going to say, or how to say it, before they begin, they should also demystify the reading process. In this way they will demonstrate to students that they are no more "inspired" readers, understanding perfectly the first time they read a difficult poem, than they are inspired writers who sit by an open window waiting for a great idea to come in.

The rationale for asking students to write about what they perceive, how they feel about it, and what associations they have with a text also corresponds very closely with the ideas about writing instruction of Britton (1978), who claims that all writing evolves from expressive writing, and of Flower (1981), who states that all students begin by writing what she calls "writer-based prose," that is, writing for which the only intended reader is the writer herself.

Using Reading to Write for Communication. When we work with this heuristic in the classroom we eventually arrive at a point where a student will ask the following question: "How are we ever going to learn how to write a good essay if we just keep reading stories and writing stories about the stories we read?" We found an answer to that question in a book by Kenneth Bruffee (1984), *A Short Course in Writing*, which is now in its third edition. Bruffee suggests beginning the semester with the kind of personal narrative writing that we have found to evolve naturally from the Petrosky/Bleich heuristic. Next he has students look for issues,

or, as he puts it, "sharable concerns," in their writing, because the first step in writing for a larger audience is to discover what might also concern someone else.

Issues are usually expressed in noun phrases (teenage marriage, father-daughter relationships), or in questions (How much independence should parents allow teenage daughters? Has reading really helped my ability to write?). Reader-writers make a list of issues found in their own or someone else's writing, then choose one and make up more questions about it. Some questions on the issue of teenage marriages might include: How much freedom should parents give a teenager in deciding on marriage? Is teenage marriage ever good? What problems come from teenage marriages? The writer then picks one question to focus on, turning the question into a generalization, such as, "A great number of problems result from teenage marriages."

Learning to Generalize and Abstract. By looking for issues and making generalizations about them in both their reading and their writing, students learn what makes writing meaningful and important to any reader. The act of transforming a personal narrative into a piece of expository writing in this way leads to the development of a different kind of thinking skill. Luria (1976), a Russian psychologist, shows what life is like without that skill. In his experiments, Luria presented his subjects, who were illiterate peasants, with syllogisms, such as: Cotton grows well where it is hot and dry. England is cold and damp. Can cotton grow there or not? Or: In the far north, where there is snow, all the bears are white. Novaya Zemlyz (a place) is in the far north. What color are the bears?

A typical answer to Luria's question about cotton growing in England was, "I don't know. I've only been in the Kashgar country; I don't know beyond that." To the question about the color of the bears a common reply was, "We always speak only of what we see; we don't talk about what we haven't seen." Or this sequence: "I don't know what color the bears there are. I never saw them." When the questioner persisted with, "But what do you think?" the peasant answered, "Once I saw a bear in a museum, but that's all." Luria concludes that with literate social and communication forms, a person can go beyond the fixation on and reproduction of his individual empirical experience to become part of the "sphere of abstract general human experience" which is established in language. In other words, the person inhabits a larger world.

Luria's peasants' responses remind us of our own students' responses when we first ask them to use the Petrosky heuristic. For example, one young woman who was a fluent if not always correct writer, and literate in that she could read, typically wrote a very long answer to the first question, what she had perceived. Then she wrote a shorter paragraph, about four or five lines, in answer to the second question, how she felt about it. When it came to making an association, however, she wrote nothing. She said she couldn't make one. Nothing in her experience, she felt, related to the newspaper article she had read on gene research. Even though she could read, like the illiterate peasants, she might just as well have said, "I don't know. I've never been to Kashgar." What she read remained outside her experience.

With some urging, this student began tentatively to make some associations, and by the time she had written three or four more responses, her associations became the longest part of her paper. We have generally found this to be true for other students. They do not make associations or tell their feelings easily at the beginning, although they love to write long summaries. But with practice and examples, they begin to shorten the summaries and lengthen the responses. Their reading, at this point, is becoming part of them.

Reading/Writing and Thinking Skills. To make another person's words part of our own experience, it is necessary to think about what we read. Thinking involves using language. Herein lies a connection between reading and writing. If we read something and don't think about it--by putting our thoughts into words--it does not become part of our experience. By asking students to write about reading, we are asking them to think.

To have the reading become part of her experience, a reader needs to do more than just decode the words and summarize. The reader must abstract and generalize. James Moffett (1968) reminds us of how writers abstract, and his discussion of abstraction is very useful. To abstract means to conceive of something apart from its concrete form and to take features from the concrete or the "raw phenomena." When we write, we take from the thing we are talking about. We stress and ignore, and select certain things from perception and memory to write down. When the writer makes a point that connects the subject to the reader, she generalizes.

As Squire (1984) points out, "Instruction in both comprehending and composing must concentrate on coping with the total process of constructing and reconstructing ideas: not discrete skills of either." To connect the two sides of the thinking process, Squire suggests getting readers to re-create *in writing* the structure and meaning of what they read. They can, Squire says, summarize, retell, rephrase, reprocess, elaborate, act out, translate from one medium to another. To his list, we add, respond affectively and associate. Through the Petrosky and Bruffee heuristics, students become personally engaged with the composing or comprehending of text. Once they become personally engaged, they tend to employ even more complex thinking strategies (Sternglass, 1986, p. 84).

We who teach writing have found that we do help students to connect the two sides of the thinking process by incorporating reading into the course work. Through reading, our students are better informed as writers; their writing connects to a larger world. We can distinguish the papers of our student writers who read from those of writers who do not read by their thinking, their ability to generalize, to create meaning, to make a point. By responding to other people's writing they become better readers of their own texts and, finally, better writers.

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EASY DOESN'T DO IT: INTRODUCING ESL READERS TO "REAL ENGLISH"

NANCY ERBER CADET

As college ESL instructors, we should concern ourselves not only with students' language development while they are enrolled in our programs, but also with the adjustments they must make when they enroll in regular college courses. One important college requirement for which they must be prepared is to read and comprehend a substantial amount and variety of text efficiently--whatever their majors may be. Working exclusively with adapted reading materials in the ESL classroom will not prepare students adequately for this requirement.

Nonnative speakers of English enrolled in post-ESL college courses are especially in need of training in efficient and effective reading. In high enrollment lecture sections, they may not take accurate notes or be able to request explanations or repetition from the instructor. Post-ESL college students often report that textbooks are the only resource they have for clarification and reinforcement of course material. Yet students in regular college courses rely on the reading of all kinds of unadapted English-language material to supplement their in-class comprehension.

ESL students, on the average, read more slowly than students who are native speakers. They have a more limited English vocabulary, and their background knowledge differs from that of individuals raised in this country. This difference in readers' background knowledge--that is, in the socio-cultural expectations shared to a certain extent by members of a society--affects the inferences ESL student readers draw from the texts they read. However, these students will enroll in college courses where the accurate exposition of a set amount of information in a fixed period of time is the goal, and where students' individual rates of development and different backgrounds are not particularly taken into account.

Although the task is clearly not an easy one, college ESL instructors must prepare students to read unadapted, contemporary English prose on their own if they are to compete, as they must, with native speakers of English in post-ESL courses. Intermediate and advanced level ESL students should be exposed to materials of comparable difficulty before they exit the ESL program. They must also be provided with techniques and practice in text analysis to help them get at the meaning of unadapted English prose.

One way of training ESL students to get at the meaning of a "real English" text is stylistic analysis, a method that focuses first on how the text is written. Stylistic analysis looks at repetitions of lexical items, the uses of specific verb tenses, of comparatives, conditionals, and other lexico-grammatical features of a given reading selection to draw conclusions about meaning.

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Style analysis encourages ESL students to approach texts from an area of strength: their knowledge of English grammar and of the relation between grammar and meaning. It temporarily shifts the focus from areas such as vocabulary, where ESL students may be weak. Used in small group work, stylistic text analysis allows students with grammar-based language learning backgrounds to function as "experts" in their groups. These are the same students who are often overlooked by their peers in the ESL class because they are not fluent speakers or "risk-takers." Moreover, because professional writers use style to convey meaning, stylistic analysis equips ESL students with a technique for deriving meaning from a wide variety of unadapted English prose.

Professional writers consciously foreground lexico-grammatical features for specific effects, just as storytellers use voice modulation, hesitation, and repetition in narrative to elicit certain responses from their audience. Indeed, the "living English" of professional writers in many instances illustrates rather than contradicts prescriptions on grammar book usage.

For example, in one of my advanced reading classes, students read a *New York Times* article by Tom Wicker, "Kennedy is Killed by Sniper as He Rides in Car in Dallas," which was written on the day of John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963. The lead paragraph of Wicker's article, from "President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was shot" to "Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested . . . and was accused of the killing" (McQuade and Atwan, 1985, p. 137), is written almost exclusively in the passive voice. I asked students to comment on this. The students reasoned that Wicker chose to write in the passive voice because (a) he wanted to focus on the President, who was the most important person in the news story, (b) Wicker's information came from eyewitnesses who reported on what they saw, and (c) he concentrated on the "what" and "how" of the event, not the "who" or "why." The students' observations resembled the explanations of passive voice usage in English found in textbooks.

Style does convey meaning. Repetition, choice of vocabulary, sentence length, mode, and verb tense are all elements of style. Because much of stylistic analysis depends on elements that are readily apparent on the printed page, it is also an appropriate way of introducing students to functions and conventions of style with which they may be less familiar. For example, sentence length, exclamation points, and quotation marks can lead to discussions of American English punctuation. This awareness, in turn, can help developmental writers (which ESL students often are) to vary the tone and register of their own writing.

When I ask students to do a stylistic analysis, I give them a reading checklist that begins with the following detailed question about style:

Which of the following do you find repeatedly in the reading? Check as many as necessary.

_____ numbers, percentages, statistics
_____ emotional words (*love, hate, danger . . .*)
_____ exclamations
_____ repetition of words or phrases
_____ very short sentences
_____ very long sentences
_____ comparative or superlative words (*best, worst, never . . .*)

_____ conditional words (*could, would have, if . . .*)
_____ "I" referring to the author
_____ "you" referring to the reader
_____ questions
_____ commands
_____ quotations
_____ passive voice
_____ sentences beginning with a modifier (*Suddenly, Actually . . .*)

Asking student readers these questions will elicit information on content as well as form, and will make them more aware of author-audience interaction, of register, and of tone.

The reading checklist then elicits the inevitable and very necessary "Why?" It poses two questions about ideas:

1. Does the writing have one main topic or central theme?
   _____ yes _____ no _____not sure
2. In one paragraph, write what you think the author wants you to remember about this article/essay/story.

There are, of course, many sources of "real English" reading material. One that I recommend is the daily newspaper *USA Today*, because it publishes a daily "Lifestyle" section with short articles on cultural phenomena, such as multiple remarriage and two-career couples, features charts and graphs in each of its four sections, and also has a two-page editorial section with an "inquiring photographer" feature and paired guest editorials called "opposing viewpoints." I also recommend anthologies of contemporary American fiction and nonfiction, such as McQuade and Atwan's *Popular Writing in America* (1985).

As with all unadapted materials, the ones I recommend present some problems for an audience of nonnative speakers. *USA Today* reporters use jargon and slang. Some of the selections in the anthology *Popular Writing in America*, which range in length from one page to twenty, are inappropriate for ESL students because they demand historical or cultural background knowledge far beyond that of recent and even not-so-recent arrivals to this country. Other selections in the book (intended as a reader for college writing courses) have overly complex syntax or too many unknown vocabulary items for most ESL students. It is up to the instructor, of course, to gauge the appropriateness of reading selections, as well as the reading level and the frustration level of her particular students.

Nevertheless, unrevised reading materials on contemporary topics should be included in intermediate and advanced college-level ESL programs. Extensive reading of such unadapted material is one of the few ways a nonnative speaker of English can acquire the background knowledge he or she needs. And analyzing these "real texts" through their apparent features of style and form proves to be an approach to comprehension and interpretation that is especially accessible to ESL readers.

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AESOPIC DOUBLE "TAKEOUTABLES"

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At the 1985 CAWS Conference on Writing, the keynote speaker, Robert Scholes, distinguished writer and professor of English at Brown University, exhorted writing teachers "to look for those little classic takeoutables," and especially philosophical ones, because "writing should not be only skill, but thinking." Dr. Scholes was referring in this context to all basic levels of college writing, including ESL. He suggested, moreover, that college expository writing--at any level--be upgraded as a liberal art and ranked side by side with literature. Cheered on by Dr. Scholes's fighting words, I have seized upon his catchy label, *takeoutable*, qualified it by the adjective *double* and applied it in a special way to the semi-legendary Aesop, reputed to have lived in ancient Greece between 620-560 B.C., and to have been the first maker and collector of fables in the Western world (Downs, p. 31).

I already had assigned Aesopic fables as epitomized case histories in a basic writing course at John Jay College and devised a series of activities for composition and rhetoric suitable (but not exclusively) for law enforcement, police science, and criminal justice students. The chewy wisdoms of Aesop, especially those about sparing one's own hide at all costs, proved a good match for the inner city savvy of my students. Those students who came from cultures with rich oral traditions were, I found, immediately responsive to fables.

I am not alone in recognizing the educational value of Aesopic fables, nor the first to rediscover the wisdom they apply to the human condition. Modern psychiatrists and criminologists have shown a renewed interest in animal fable in order to study various types of insanity and criminality (Yoder, p. 27). Educators of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and Elizabethan times were especially fond of assigning Aesop as an essential part of the rhetorical training of young princes (Yoder, pp. 7-8).

Indeed, my writing students proved quite capable of employing the ancient rhetorical tradition of exempla in response to the crafty pith, point, and prudence of Aesop's fables. I assigned them fable 17 of the Penguin edition, the shortest fable in the volume and the most remarkable for terse subtlety: "A vixen sneered at a lioness because she never bore more than one cub. 'Only one,' she replied, 'but a lion.'" After recovering from shocks of delight in the fable's leonine, primordial perfection, the students molded its ageless irony into original, quite satiric, interpretations, carrying a variety of political, social, psychological, even judicial, messages.

It was while consulting the footnotes in the Penguin edition of Aesop that I

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happened upon the double takeoutable. I realized that these Aesopic atoms, fossil energy for instruction and pleasure, so to speak, glowed within priceless classics of Greece and Rome, where they were used as exempla to construct arguments or illustrate human character or situation. I began to search more diligently for such buried fusions, finding them in the "best sellers" of Hesiod, Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Aristophanes, Zenophon, as well as Plutarch, Livy, and Horace. I concluded that Aesopic double takeoutables would doubly entertain and instruct basic writers who feel locked out of the rich world of the classics.

In the term *Aesopic double takeoutable* I acknowledge several functions of this classical extract. The term *Aesopic*, according to Aesop scholar Ben Edwin Perry, refers to "a useful repertory of the material and traditions, however fictitious, that have been associated with Aesop or his style within arbitrarily chosen limits, either of time and place or of authors and texts" (p. viii). A *takeoutable*, minus the *double*, signifies something readable lifted out of a larger context. Applied to an Aesopic fable, a pared-to-the-bone structure out of which nothing can be taken because nothing would be left, *takeoutable*, nonetheless, can apply to time, since a fable can also be taken out of an immemorial past. An Aesopic fable as a function of a larger classic takeoutable of the Scholes' species is a double *takeoutable*. Critic Robert Alter gave the phrase *double take* literary status in a recent article on the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai, noting that one of his poems required "a double take of figurative rereading" (*The New York Times Magazine*, 8 June 1986, p. 50). Similarly, a double takeoutable might also be defined as a delayed surprise insight into wider figurative exemplification (than had at first been expected) of an Aesopic fable, nesting snugly in the branches of a priceless classical work.

To demonstrate more fully Aesopic double takeoutables at work in a basic writing course, I have chosen "small doses" (Scholes) of Plato's Socratic dialogues, the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, the great trilogy that reconstructs Socrates' indictment, trial, and execution, a virtual Greek tragic drama in parts, and prefaced the passages with a wry fable about Socrates. In keeping with Aesopic epitome and Socratic dialectic, an introductory lecture to such a writing class should be Socratic in method: Who was Aesop? Socrates? How can ancient Greece and Rome still proffer our threatened technological age answers to questions of degraded values and meaning? Answers to these and other key questions can coalesce into seed-sowing groundwork, beginning with the fable (198):

> *A small house was being built for Socrates - a man whose fate I would willingly share if I might share his glory, whose ill-fame while he lived was a small price to pay for being judged guiltless now that he is dust and ashes. A passerby made the obvious sort of remark that people make: "Fancy a man like you building such a poky house!" "I only hope," said Socrates, "that I can find enough true friends to fill it."*

The tidy concision of this fable invites exegesis, encapsulating as it does the history of the most famous teacher of classical antiquity, the challenger of decadent traditions who was condemned to death for allegedly corrupting Athenian youth. Like a small striated stone, excavated with larger artifacts, the fable yields, however, several layers of meaning about a complex civilization concerned with declining intellectual, moral, and practical values, an Athens of 399 B.C.; a troubled city, recently (after the Peloponnesian Wars, 431-404 B.C.) capitulated to Sparta,

divided by civic factions (Downs, p. 90); a corrupt city determined to find a scapegoat in Socrates, who modestly identified himself to his accusers as "a sort of gadfly" given to the huge, indolent "steed" of state to spur it on with a sharp sting on the hindquarters (*Apology*, p. 18). Inner city students should have no problem responding to the implications of this fable once they have gained some knowledge of its historical background. As Socratic gadflies, themselves, they can apply the fable as an exemplum to address Big Apple issues of crime and corruption. Such exercises can be followed by more formal written responses to the key takeoutables from the dialogues.

The Socratic dialogues are masterpieces of classical prose--lucid, eloquent, and reasoned--that present basic writers with inimitable models for persuasion and logical argumentation. In these dialogues we can experience, seemingly first hand, the pretension-deflating irony and spider web of questions with which Socrates trapped the sophistic Athenian intelligentsia. Gilbert Highet (1957, p. 158) has described the Socratic process:

> *His methods were, first, the modest declaration of his own ignorance--which imperceptibly flattered the other man and made him eager to explain to such an intelligent but naive inquirer; second, his adaptability--which showed him the side on which each man could be best approached; and, third, his unfailing good humor--which allowed him always to keep the conversation going and at crises, when the other lost his temper, to dominate it. . . . under his gently persistent questions, his opponent is--not forced, but led, to admit that he was wrong, and to fall into helpless silence.*

A key takeoutable from the *Apology* (Socrates' great speech to the Athenian jury) demonstrates the condemned philosopher in top form, confounding young Meletus, a vapid poet who was induced by the 501 Athenian citizens who constituted Socrates' judge and jury to denounce him for corrupting youth with his radical ideas:

> *Come hither, Meletus, and let me question you.*
> *You think a great deal about the improvement of youth?*
>
> *Yes, I do.*
>
> *Tell the judges, then, who is their improver; for you must know, as you have taken the pains to discover their corrupter, and are citing and accusing me before them. Speak then, tell the judges who their improver is. Observe, Meletus, that you are silent and have nothing to say. But is not this rather disgraceful, and very considerable proof of what I was saying, that you have no interest in the matter? Speak up, friend, and tell us who their improver is.*
>
> *The laws.*
>
> *But that, my good sir, is not my meaning. I want to know who the person is who, in the first place, knows the laws?*
>
> *The judges, Socrates, who are present in court.*
>
> *What do you mean to say, Meletus, that they are able to instruct and improve youth?*
>
> *Certainly they are.*
>
> *What, all of them, or some only and not others?*
>
> *All of them.*

By the goddess Hera that is good news! There are plenty of improvers then. And what do you say of the audience--do they improve them?

They improve them.

. . .

Then every Athenian improves and elevates them; all with the exception of myself; and I alone am their corrupter? Is that what you affirm?

That is what I stoutly affirm.

I am very unfortunate if that is true. . . . Happy indeed would be the condition of youth if they had one corrupter only, and the rest of the world were their improvers. And you, Meletus, have sufficiently shown that you never had a thought about the young: Your carelessness is seen in your not caring about matters spoken of in this very indictment.

(Eliot, ed., 1909, pp. 10-12)

At the conclusion of this model Socratic cross-examination, Meletus withers into speechlessness, yet despite the elder savant's superior performance, the jurors declare him guilty by a close vote and decree death (Downs, p. 91). Regardless of this final stroke of injustice, Socrates is pleased that "they know that I am speaking the truth, and that Meletus is lying." What student writer would not be moved by this courageous apology for calm reason and not wish to know the man (lumpy, unkempt, lax as husband and father) in order to learn more about his dialectical finesse? I have found most basic and ESL writers eager for serious argument, but lacking the skill to engage in formal argumentation. Their fragile self-esteem, always under fire in college writing courses, can be reinforced when they learn from Socrates the fundamentals of the chief rhetorical mode, dialectical reasoning.

In conjunction with discussions of the main point and Socratic strategy of the Meletus passage, basic writers can be introduced to the tools of persuasion and logical argument, including premise-building and deductive and inductive reasoning; they can discover the seven logical fallacies and how to avoid them in marshalling evidence by closely examining Socrates' swift, sure line of defense; they can consider the effects of audience and language (everyday Athenian speech) in argument (Highet, p. 157); they can learn about the contest of opposites (always functioning in the Socratic method) and try to discern how falsehood generates truth and vice versa, committing their findings to compositions addressing Socrates' question, not about youth corruption, but about youth corrupters.

The source of the second double takeoutable, the *Crito*, is a demanding mental exercise, yet full of implicit drama. Crito, a young disciple, pays a dawn visit to Socrates' prison cell with a plan of escape. Socrates calmly rejects the plan, not out of fear but reason. To escape would mean violating Athenian law and striking at the core of the social order, a craven act (Downs, p. 92):

And a good life is equivalent to a just and honorable one--that holds also?

Yes, that holds.

From these premises I proceed to argue the question whether I ought or ought not to try to escape without the consent of the Athenians; and if I am clearly right in escaping, then I will make the attempt; but if not, I will abstain. . . . But if you go away from well-governed states to Crito's friends in Thessaly, where there is great disorder and license, they will be charmed to have the tale of your escape from prison. . . . but there will be no one to remind that in your old age you violated the most sacred laws from a miserable desire of a little more life. Perhaps not, if you keep them in a good temper; but if they are out of temper you will hear many degrading things; and you will live, but how?--as the flatterer of all men, and the servant of all men; and doing what--eating and drinking in Thessaly . . .

(Eliot, ed., 1909, p. 43)

Young Crito is crestfallen and concedes, "I have nothing to say, Socrates." The poignant irony of the dialogue lies in the fact that the aging sage wins in argument only to die. To prepare for his death, he absolves the state from guilt "for what is to be in effect a judicial murder" (Downs, p. 92). To assure that justice is done, however, he then condemns his judges and accusers, the jury, for perverting the laws of Athens for evil purposes. Unconcerned for his own life, Socrates asserts the superiority of individual conscience over manipulated law. The issues here are complex, but basic writers can match them with home issues, and practice comparison and contrast in their own compositions.

Finally, it is the task of young Phaedo, another disciple, to report the last hours of Socrates, hence the title of the third Socratic dialogue. Socrates, serene as the gods on Mount Olympus, discourses on the soul's journey after death, concluding with the memorable mansions of the soul passage:

. . . those who have duly purified themselves with philosophy live henceforth altogether without body, in mansions fairer far than these, which may not be described. . . .

I do not mean to affirm that the description which I have given of the soul and her mansions is exactly true--a man of sense ought hardly to say that. But I do say that, inasmuch as the soul is shown to be immortal, he may venture to think not improperly or unworthily, that something of the kind is true.

(Eliot, ed., 1909, p. 111)

How can basic writers possibly respond to the sublimity of this passage on the immortality of the soul? As students learning to be interested in the pursuit of knowledge, as well as of higher truths, they are, like Plato, Crito, Phaedo, and every other student before them, genuine disciples of Socrates. Justly claiming their classical legacy by coming to college, they can be encouraged to consider questions of a higher order and to write individual discourses on the indictment, trial, and execution of their ancient mentor, re-creating in their own words one of the great dramas in the intellectual history of the Western World. If such roles and assignments seem absurdly irrelevant for inner city students, it must be recalled that Socrates was a teacher of the streets of Athens, not the elite academies (Highet, p. 157).

I concur with Dr. Scholes (who recommends Plato for basic writers) that such classics implemented in college writing courses can combat curriculum entropy. Even the few modest incursions into the dramatic and erudite world of Plato's Socratic dialogues that I have suggested invite students to a banquet of reflection and inquiry into the age-old concern for the Good and the True, the Just and the Beautiful, whatever forms they may assume. Through such double takeoutables from the ancient, homespun Aesop, basic writers, native and nonnative English speakers alike, can begin to explore the best of our cultural heritage.

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TWO WALKS: WAYS OF PRESENTING POETRY

JEAN McCONOCHIE

Among the current trends in language teaching is a renewed interest in literature as subject matter for classes in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). To entice you to become part of the trend, I offer five general teaching principles and illustrate them, as well as several procedures and techniques, in the course of two poetic walks. Won't you come along?

Principle 1: Choose a poem (the same would hold for a short story, novel, or play) that will engage your students' interest by leading them to a deeper understanding of themselves. This principle focuses on emotional rather than intellectual involvement, for self-understanding is a matter of lifelong concern for all thoughtful people.

Principle 2: In discussing a poem, start with the story, with the drama that is at the center of every work of literature. Who is the storyteller, the speaker? Who or what is the speaker talking about? Where is the story set? What happens in the course of the story? How do we know? We need to help our students see how a skillful reader finds the answers to these questions. (How the student can apply this knowledge to other areas of the curriculum is apparent, for the processes of asking questions and making inferences are basic to all successful reading.)

Principle 3: Help your students to recognize, and perhaps to understand, the work's underlying cultural assumptions. In reading any literary text, a student needs to be able to identify cultural references and to associate explicit statements with implicit cultural values. We can teach students how to approach this task objectively and to evaluate a writer's perspective within its original context as well as their own.

Principle 4: Present the formal aspects of poetry--rhyme, meter, and figures of speech--simply as ways in which an author plays with language, both working within and expanding linguistic and poetic conventions. Certainly any discussion of these more subtle--and most intimidating--matters is best postponed until students are comfortable with the story line of the poem.

Principle 5: After taking a poem (or other work of literature) apart, take the time to reassemble it, to help your students to see how all the elements--story, cultural assumptions, and technique--work together to create meaning. This step of relating sound and sense, form and function, is indispensable, for their combination is the essence of literary creation.

Now let's see how these principles can be applied to two poems that might be suitable for an ESOL classroom.

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A Poetic Walk with Robert Frost

Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" is a well-known poem by one of America's best-known poets. In introducing the poem to a class, I would present the following facts, though in a less-condensed form: Robert Frost was born in 1874 and lived well into this century, dying in 1963 at the age of 89. Frost is famous for the informal, conversational tone of his poems, as well as for his insights into the relation between man and nature. His poems often describe simple rural scenes in New England. (Here a teacher might want to show a picture.) In many of Frost's poems, there is a strong sense of someone talking out loud, adjusting his or her thoughts as he (for simplicity, we can stay with the masculine pronoun for this poem) hears what he is saying.

In "The Road Not Taken," the speaker tells us about an incident one autumn day in the country. On that day, walking without any particular destination, the speaker hesitated between two attractive roads. He looked as far ahead as he could on one road, following it with his eye to the point "where it bent in the undergrowth." Then he chose the other road. Why? Well, it was equally appealing to the eye (was "just as fair") and it had the additional attraction of being less used ("it was grassy and wanted wear"). Oddly enough, though, the speaker almost immediately contradicts that judgment, saying, "as for that, the passing there / Had worn them really about the same." The speaker also noticed that he (the speaker could, of course, be either a man or a woman) was the first to approach either road that day, for on both roads the fallen leaves were golden.

The speaker told himself that he would take the first road another time. Then, returning to his original impression of a difference between the roads, he decided on "the one less traveled by."

Is that the end? Not quite. The speaker has been talking about something that happened at an unspecified time in the past. Suddenly the time orientation shifts, an important signal in English. "I shall be telling this with a sigh," the speaker says, "somewhere ages and ages hence"--at an unspecified time in the distant future. What kind of sigh will it be--one of relief? regret? resignation? nostalgia? We are not told. All we learn is that the choice, somehow, has been momentous. Here is the poem.

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

diverged - went in different directions.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

wanted - needed, called for.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

trodden - past participle of *tread*, to press beneath the foot, walk heavily (on something).

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

hence - from now, after this time.

To summarize the procedures illustrated thus far, I introduced the poem by saying something about the poet and the typical characteristics of his work. Then I paraphrased the poem, staying with its surface meaning and explaining the less common words and phrases. In a class, I would next read the poem aloud, a step that should always be included at some stage of a presentation, though not necessarily at the beginning. Either in the same class period or the next, I would give students their chance to react to and talk about the poem.

Applying the Five Principles to Frost's Poem

Now let's see how the five principles apply. The wide appeal of this poem surely has to do with the universality of its theme--how making a choice between similar alternatives can prove to change one's life. It is a good poem, then, to meet the requirements of the first principle--leading the reader to deeper self-understanding through imaginative identification with the poem's speaker.

Following the second principle, in classroom discussion, start with the story. (The teacher's role is, of course, to stimulate discussion of the poem rather than to lecture on it.) Who is the speaker? An adult, surely, and a well-educated one at that. How do we know?

The experience reflected in the phrase "knowing how way leads on to way" is one clue; the use of the words *diverged* and *trodden* is another. Where is the story set? We don't know where the speaker is now, but he tells of an autumn day when he was walking in the woods. What happened on that day? The speaker faced a choice between two roads that he found equally appealing. Wishing that he could take both but knowing that was impossible, the speaker hesitated. Then, after doing his best to see where one of the roads led, he chose the other--the one that seemed "less traveled by." Later he realized that the choice had made "all the

difference," although he leaves it to the reader to ponder in *what* all the difference has been made.

The cultural significance of the speaker's choice (the third principle) becomes apparent when we shift from the literal sense of *road* to its figurative meaning. Is it not true that in some situations, taking the better-worn path--following the established codes--is the expected choice? Yet the poem's speaker takes the less-used road. Is he, then, in terms of the culture that he represents, a nonconformist or even a rebel? The desire to investigate new territory, to break new ground, is historically considered to be characteristic of Americans. However, the people of New England, with whom Frost is usually associated, are noted not only for their independence but also for their conservatism. Perhaps that combination accounts for some of the speaker's ambivalence, an ambivalence pointed up by the title, which calls our attention to the rejected option.

In response to the fourth principle, what can we say about the formal aspects of the poem? The primary figure of speech, as we have seen, is an extended metaphor--an implied comparison--of paths in a wood. In other words, the woods, the two roads, and the idea of traveling all have a level of meaning beyond the literal. For one thing, the path of life regularly branches; every human life has moments of choice. Moreover, the consequences of our choices can never fully be predicted, for they are hidden in the "undergrowth" of the future. The metaphor also suggests that human contact with nature--with natural beauty--necessarily changes it, just as yellow leaves are blackened by human footsteps.

It is also worth noting that this poem, which has such a conversational tone, is almost perfectly regular in rhyme and meter. Each of the four stanzas has five lines, of which the first, third, and fourth rhyme (*wood, stood, could*), as do the second and fifth (*both, growth*). Each line has four stressed syllables, with either one or two unstressed syllables between: "two **roads diverged** in a **yellow wood** / and **sorry I could** not **travel both**" and so on. The regularity of the strong beats gives a sense of unity to the poem and also suggests the regularity of life, while the mid-stanza shift in rhyming pattern and the shifts from one to two unstressed syllables between each strong stress may reflect the unexpected choices that we face in life.

I hope it is now becoming clear, satisfying the requirement of the fifth principle, how all of these aspects fit together to give the poem its meaning. Through the action, word choice, and even metrical form of the poem, we are reminded of the choices we must make in life and of the unpredictability of their consequences. Only after the fact may we realize that a simple decision has "made all the difference," has changed a life in a significant way. Regret, relief, resignation, nostalgia--all are possible reactions to what might have been. Robert Frost's genius lies in having found a simple yet memorable metaphor to capture this truth.

A Poetic Walk with Alicia Ostriker

Our second walk will be through a poem that also uses the image of walking on a

road in order to capture a feeling. However, both the specific situation and the form of the poem are strikingly different from what we have just seen.

The author of the second poem, "Don't Be Afraid," is Alicia Ostriker, a contemporary American poet (she was born in 1937) who has been compared to the nineteenth-century American poet Emily Dickinson in the intimacy and emotional power of her verse. Ostriker writes of husbands and wives, parents and children, and of people's struggles for connection with those they love.

Don't Be Afraid

This is when I want to open you
Like a sweater, like a jacket

That you have kept closed,
To walk into your heart

As if it were a major avenue
In an unpolluted city, and I could hike
From one end of the city to the other
With all I own on my back,
Breathing the fresh
Air of your heart, looking at the clouds and buildings.

hike - take a long, vigorous walk for pleasure.

Applying the Five Principles to Ostriker's Poem

There are two people in the poem--the speaker and the person spoken to. We seem to be overhearing their conversation, though perhaps the reader is intended to assume the role of the second person. The poem's title is a reassurance that we have all heard from someone who was concerned with our welfare and wanted to calm us in time of stress.

This poem, in fact, begins with the title, rather than with the first line. The speaker herself (once again, the speaker could be either a man or a woman) is giving the reassurance, "don't be afraid." Why is the speaker saying this? Is she (to give the feminine pronoun equal time) admitting that she presents a threat? Or is she perhaps projecting her own fears, attributing her own feelings to the listener? Or is the speaker the poet, reassuring the reader? As you read the poem, you can make up your own mind. This poem, too, may stimulate new self-understanding.

Let's start with the story. Who is the speaker? Someone who is going to "walk into [a second person's] heart," which is compared to a "major avenue" in an "unpolluted city." What is the speaker proposing to do in this city of another person's self? The speaker is going to "hike"--carrying all her worldly goods in a backpack (just as student travelers sometimes do today)--"from one end of the city

to the other," taking deep breaths of fresh air and "looking at clouds and buildings."

Why does the speaker want to make this exploration of another person? The most obvious alternatives are curiosity or love, the latter seeming more likely from the tenderness of the words. Is this a parent asking for access to a child's world? Perhaps. Or one adult asking for emotional access to another? That, too, is possible. It also seems that the speaker is both offering protection ("Don't be afraid") and asking for it ("I want to walk into your heart"). We'll return to these possibilities in a moment.

What about cultural assumptions, the third principle? On the surface level, the speaker takes it for granted that a city is an appropriate place to hike with a backpack and that such an activity would be enjoyable for the hiker. That juxtaposition of an urban setting and rural activity might seem unremarkable to someone who grew up in the United States after the 1960s, but perhaps it would initially be mystifying to other readers. Is the assumption about backpacking in a city more American than European or Asian? That question might lead to a lively class discussion.

A second, and more subtle, cultural assumption is that it is both possible and desirable to know another person well. While many cultures share that belief, within any culture there are differences of opinion about how much and what kinds of openness or assertion are appropriate. For example, in American culture, are men and women allowed the same degree of openness in expressing or acknowledging emotions? This topic, too, could stimulate discussion.

Looking at formal matters, the fourth principle, may help us to discover more about the "story," the drama. The poem begins with a metaphor--opening and walking into someone--that encapsulates two similes (comparisons pointed out by the words *like* or *as*): "open you like a jacket" and "as if it were a major avenue." The heart is often used metaphorically as the location of feelings and emotions. (In ancient times, the liver was so identified.) Although the heart is here admiringly described as the principal thoroughfare in a city, the association with emotion remains.

The hiker and the backpack are surely also metaphorical. What do you suppose is in the backpack--the speaker's life history? Memories of other loves? The "unpolluted city" would seem to be the selfhood--the feelings, ideas, instincts, and hopes--of the person to whom the poem is addressed.

Who, then, is the visitor? And why might the visit be a cause of fear? While the speaker's tone suggests that the request for entry is made in a spirit of love, we have already seen that love might be interpreted as either gentle or aggressive. And the idea of being emotionally "entered" by someone else is frightening, isn't it? As much as we want to be understood by others, we are all wary of sharing our deepest feelings, of letting others see our deepest selves, and with that, our vulnerability. So in this poem, figurative language is used to explore the ideas of intimacy and aggression, ideas that are indeed frightening when approached directly.

Discussing the ways in which one person might seek to enter another's world

could be stimulating in some ESL classes. On a simpler level, the poem might be used to provide a fresh context for a paragraph using the hypothetical, or unreal, conditional. For instance, the opening sentence might be, "If I were a city and someone could walk around inside me, that person would see. . . ." Or students could speculate on what a curious hiker might see in the city-of-self of some well-known public or historical figure. What, for example, would a hiker see on a walk through Elizabeth Taylor or George Washington? The answer could be spoken, written, or even presented graphically, as in a collage. These possible classroom activities suggest how the poem might lead students to a deeper understanding of both themselves and others.

Observing the fifth principle, we can say that, in a simple eight lines, the poet has given fresh life to the romantic cliche of entering someone's heart. And she has done so, appropriately enough, not with conventional rhyme and meter, but with the free verse form used by many contemporary poets.

Conclusion

Poetry, then, can provide ESL students with stimulating contexts for discussion as well as for reading, writing, and listening. And good poems can be read and reread with increasing pleasure. Moreover, using poems and other works of literature in the classroom can be stimulating for us as teachers, helping us to remember the qualities of the English language that first attracted us to this, our glorious profession.

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VYGOTSKY'S THEORY OF COGNITIVE PROCESSING: A POSSIBLE GROUNDING FOR SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION RESEARCH

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One of the long-standing problems of second language acquisition (SLA) research is a general lack of grounding in a broad base of cognitive processing theory. Language learning, second or first, is treated without consideration for such cognitive processes as memory, planning, and perception, resulting in theories that cover some aspects of the learning process but omit others. In addition, because these theories then rest in midair, so to speak, it is difficult to operationalize definitions for research and connect our teaching practices to one specific theory. We tend, therefore, to attach our teaching practices to whatever theory is currently in vogue.

I propose that we might overcome these specific problems by using Vygotsky's theory of learning and cognitive processing to operationalize some of our definitions, to give us a new perspective on learning, and to provide us with a broad theoretical base connected to other aspects of what Vygotsky terms "higher psychological processes."

Vygotskian theory offers several advantages. First, we can glean research ideas from work in other areas already done along Vygotskian lines; for example, we can compare our results with work done on children's cognitive development. Because Vygotsky's theories are currently in vogue among American cognitive psychologists, we need not struggle to have their general validity recognized. Moreover, many of Vygotsky's ideas fit in well with current ideas in second language acquisition. For instance, his Marxist dialecticism--that individual change must be studied in the context of society, not as an isolated phenomenon--agrees with the sociolinguistic emphasis on the importance of interaction in language use and language learning. He also stresses the importance of method in determining results. For SLA research, as for Vygotsky (1978, p. 65), "the search for method is one of the major problems of the entire enterprise of understanding the uniquely human forms of psychological activity. . . . Method is simultaneously prerequisite and product, the tool and the result of the study."

Vygotsky's emphasis on method presages recent studies (Pica, 1984; Edelsky, 1981), which show that how you analyze data will in large part determine what you find. Vygotsky also emphasizes the importance of looking at the process as well as the product. This, too, is a newly raised theme in interlanguage studies (see Long and Sato, 1984, on the need for more form-function/function-form studies, or Huebner, 1983, on the importance of longitudinal studies).

Vygotsky himself did not (at least so far as English translations of his work

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have revealed) address the processes of SLA, but only those of first language acquisition. However, the Vygotskian ideas I propose we exploit are stated in such general terms that there is room for specific application to SLA.

The Development of Control over Cognitive Tasks

The recent research done by Frawley and Lantolf (1985) is a good example of how Vygotsky can inspire us to tie SLA theories more closely to modern cognitive psychology. Frawley and Lantolf found great similarities in the narratives of intermediate ESL learners and native English speaking children describing a picture series. Frawley and Lantolf explain these similarities and "errors" by using Vygotsky's order of development of control (first, object-regulated; second, other-regulated; third, self-regulated).

For example, those whose narratives were disconnected and focused on each picture separately, rather than on the whole, are said to be object-regulated--that is, the viewer's perception was "controlled" by each picture individually so that he or she was unable (at least verbally) to connect all the pictures into one coherent story. Some subjects asked the experimenters questions, seeking other-regulation. Others spoke out loud, telling themselves what to do or making comments in order to get perspective on (or, in Vygotsky's terms, *control of*) the task. The advanced ESL learners did not use these cognitive "strategies" and their narratives resemble those of adult native speakers.

Of course, many questions remain: Is the order of control (object-regulated, other-regulated, self-regulated) innate and how are the later stages acquired? How can we manipulate tasks to change stages? How can we use these stages to enhance learning? Frawley and Lantolf's use of Vygotsky's theory has given us a new perspective on "errors" as efforts to exercise control and should lead SLA research to consider the role of control and how it develops in SLA.

Fossilization

A topic of great concern to many ESL teachers, and one which Vygotsky discusses briefly, and not in direct reference to SLA, is fossilization. He defines fossilization as a process which has gone through a long stage of development and become mechanized and automatic. He explains that the reason it is difficult to analyze fossilized processes is because "they have lost their original appearance, and their outer appearance tells us nothing whatsoever about their internal nature" (1978, p. 64). As Vygotsky delicately puts it: "Their automatic character creates great difficulties for psychological analysis." Vygotsky suggests that the researcher study the process by which the "higher form," in our case a second language, is established.

Unlike current SLA theories, Vygotsky's theory not only gives a cause for fossilization, but also explains why fossilization is so hard to study, and suggests that "to do so the researcher is often forced to alter the automatic, mechanized, fossilized character of the higher form of behavior and to turn it back to its source through the experiment" (1978, p. 64). This suggestion is excellent but as yet not

operationalized; that is, the kind of experiment that will "alter" fossilization and "turn it back to its source" awaits explanation by the research community.

The Zone of Proximal Development

Another aspect of Vygotsky's theory that has been adopted by cognitive psychology is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky defines ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, p. 86). Krashen (1981), fifty years later, has come up with a similar idea: learners cannot acquire just anything in the new language but only what is one level (i + 1) above their current competence--in other words, what is in their zone of proximal development.

Theoretically and intuitively the idea makes sense, but as usual, operationalizing it for SLA research or applying it to second language teaching is difficult and has not really been addressed. However, this notion has serious implications for our practice as teachers. If we read Vygotsky carefully, he clearly states that one cannot assume that because the performances of two learners are the same their zones of proximal development are also the same. Indeed, he warns us that we must test each individual to determine that individual's zone of proximal development. As Gantzer points out [see pp. 38-42, below--Eds.], an individual ZPD also has important consequences for the way we test students.

Toward an Understanding of Our Students' Cognitive Processes

With these ideas in mind, researchers and teachers concerned with SLA need to consider what it means to have a ZPD and how we might test for it. Consider the case of native speakers who have "communicative competence" (Hymes, 1971) in the native language. Do hypothetical native speakers have a ZPD for the native language; that is, can they develop further? Of course, native speakers can and may continue to learn vocabulary, given a need and opportunity, and presumably all of them could learn a new register if the need and chance to practice were there. As members of a speech community, they have acquired the grammatical rules of their community. So can they learn more grammar? Is there more grammar to be learned? Although the grammar of a speech community may change and thus the changes may be learned, I would argue that adult native speakers have no more grammar to learn. They know it all; otherwise how could linguists rely on their own intuitions and those of native informants to supply them with the rules of the language?

The nonnative speaker whose language is fossilized, that is, whose language learning has stopped and whose interlanguage is far from the target language, is theoretically similar to the native speaker in that his language "intuitions," or rules, are stable and automatized. Although his or her interlanguage does not match the target language, it has ceased to change and is a stable and "impermeable" linguistic system (Adjemian, 1976), as is the language of the native speaker. It is the

persistence of this very stability which, in the face of feedback, misunderstanding, discrimination, and incongruence with the target language, drives ESL teachers to despair. But the stability of the interlanguage also resembles the stability of the native speaker's system. Perhaps the fossilized interlanguage, like a native language, has virtually no ZPD, vocabulary and register excepted. This would explain why fossilized learners, despite study and meaningful communicative use, fail to develop grammatically; they have no ZPD. A case in point is Bruzzese's (1977) Angela, an Italian-born grandmother who spoke a "pidgin English" with her English-speaking children, grandchildren, and neighbors, despite motivation, lessons, and plenty of opportunity to hear targetlike English.

The next step is to find ways to measure the ZPD and see if we can find differences between fossilized and non-fossilized learners. Even the *process* of trying to find the difference may shed some light on the cognitive processes of these different learners. Vygotsky says the "fossilized form is the end of the thread that ties the present to the past" (1978, p. 64). We need now to understand our students' pasts in order to help them in the future.

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VYGOTSKIAN THEORY AND LANGUAGE TESTING

JACK GANTZER

Language test design, when it is not totally atheoretical with regard to learning theory, or simply based upon psychometrics (statistical theories of the degree of interrelatedness among mental processes--for example, reliability measures), is usually grounded in a psychological theory of learning first put forth by Binet around the turn of the century. This theory of learning maintains that (a) learning lags behind development; (b) particular states of development are prerequisites for learning (a position greatly augmented by Piaget); and (c) learning does not alter development but rather is dependent upon it and cannot therefore push development forward.

When this theory of learning forms the basis for test design, test designers focus on methods of determining the lowest threshold of learning ability, that is, the place where a particular type of knowledge or information can first be learned. In addition, their goal in testing becomes to identify those learners who are at that particular steady state of development, so that lessons can be devised which will follow from the level of development already attained. That is, according to this theoretical position, as maturation precedes learning and instruction must lag behind mental growth, all that a test needs to tell us about is what a student already knows.

We can all think of examples of tests that perform this function. In The City University of New York (CUNY), the competency tests given to entering students to determine whether or not they are in need of remediation all focus on obtaining this type of information. The CUNY Writing Assessment Test, a fifty-minute holistically graded argumentative essay, aims at determining which students can, on their own, write a minimally proficient essay; the CUNY Reading Assessment Test, a standardized reading comprehension test consisting of short passages and multiple-choice questions on main ideas, details, and inferences, is meant to determine which students can read at least at a certain minimal level. Having identified the student's stage of development as a discrete factor, such tests are used to determine the instruction deemed suitable for the student's level of learning.

Vygotsky's work (1962; 1978) suggests that maturation and learning are not mutually exclusive, but, rather, that they together constitute development and are thus dependent on each other and interactive. Essential to this point is Vygotsky's concept of the *zone of proximal development*, the ZPD. What this concept entails is the determination of two developmental levels for each learner.

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The Learner's Level of Actual Development

The first level, the one most current tests aim at discovering, Vygotsky has termed the *actual* developmental level. This is the level of development of mental functions that has been established because the learner has already completed certain developmental cycles. Our current testing mechanism assumes that the measure of this level, what learners can do on their own, best indicates mental ability. In fact, any mediation during the task performance (the use of dictionaries or verb charts, answers to related questions given by the test administrator, vocabulary clarification, grammatical explanations, collaboration with peers, explanations of cultural phenomena, additional time given to complete the task, and so forth) is thought to interfere with the accurate measurement of a student's mental development. Vygotsky (1978), however, suggests that such measurements of attained ability may in fact be misleading, as they give us no information about the potential of the students.

As classroom teachers we have seen his point demonstrated in practice, although we may not recognize it in theory. We have all had the experience of a class full of students all of whom received essentially the same scores on a competency test. Yet almost immediately we recognized that some of the students seemed adequately prepared, profited from our instruction, and made progress, while others seemed ill-prepared, and made little, if any, progress by the end of the course. Indeed, their exit performance on these same proficiency tests showed little, if any, change.

The Learner's Level of Potential Development

Vygotsky suggests that a second level of measurement, that of what the learner can do with the assistance of others, might in reality be a better indicator of the mental development and potential of the learner than measurement of what a learner can do alone. Measurement should begin, not end, with the measurement of what learners can do on their own. His studies on children show that those with the same actual developmental level differ widely in their abilities to perform with the assistance or mediation of others. Students who share the same measurable developmental level are not necessarily at the same stage of development. As a result, their subsequent patterns of learning will also be quite different.

> *Suppose I investigate two children upon entrance into school, both of whom are ten years old chronologically and eight years old in terms of mental development. Can I say they are the same age mentally? Of course. What does this mean? It means that they can independently deal with tasks up to the degree of difficulty that has been standardized for the eight year old level. If I stop at this point, people would imagine that the subsequent course of mental development and of school learning for these children will be the same. . . .*
>
> *Now imagine that I do not terminate my study at this point, but only begin it. These children seem to be capable of handling problems up to an eight year old's level, but not beyond that. Suppose that I show them various ways of dealing with the problem. Different experimenters might employ different modes of demonstration in different cases: some might run through an entire demonstration and ask the children to repeat*

it, others might initiate the solution and ask the child to finish it, or offer leading questions. In short, in some way or another I propose that the children solve the problem with my assistance. Under these circumstances it turns out the first child can deal with problems up to a twelve-year-old's level, the second up to a nine-year-old's level. Now are these children mentally the same?

When it was first shown that the capability of children with equal levels of mental development to learn under a teacher's guidance varied to a high degree, it became apparent that those children were not mentally the same age and that the subsequent course of their learning would obviously be different.

(Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 85-86)

While Vygotsky's research concentrated on measurements of mental development and growth, it may have implications for diagnostic and competency testing. What he suggests is that, in addition to assessing the actual developmental level of students, the testing situation should demonstrate to the test takers various ways of solving problems or rectifying errors and inconsistencies in their initial solo performances. That is, the test should be administered with some assistance from the instructor or tester. Then the students' abilities with mediation and assistance could also be measured. Vygotsky has termed this second level of measurement, the measurement with mediation, the potential developmental level.

The Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky's theory does not, however, simply advocate the replacement of one static measure with another, the replacement of the measurement of where a student is without help with the measurement of a student's potential with the help of another. As his theory centers upon the Marxist concept of dialectical materialism, holding that all phenomena are best studied as processes in motion and in change, it is the change in development that he sought to investigate.

By determining the distance between the two measures of development, actual and potential, Vygotsky arrived at his concept of the zone of proximal development, a measure which "defines those functions that have not yet matured *but are in the process of maturation*, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state" [emphasis added] (1978, p. 86). Determining this dynamic developmental state could enable educators to delineate learners' future progress. The instructor would be aware of both their current abilities and those skills that "are in the process of maturation." It might also allow us to place students who have similar potential in the same course. Because these students would share the same range for potential development, the entire class could be expected to meet the challenges of the course with adequate preparation. The lesson plans could benefit all of the students in a course rather than just some.

Toward the Design of Vygostkian Language Tests

What, then, should a Vygotskian test of reading or writing or listening or any other aspect of language learning look like? First of all, it should consist of a measure

of the actual developmental level of the learner. It should be able to indicate what the learner already knows and can do. This is not an easy task in itself. Many of our current tests attempt to do this, but they are based on psychometric and linguistic theories rather than on theories of language acquisition and learning and thus fall far short of this goal. (See Pica, 1984, for a similar argument concerning the theories which support second language syllabi.)

For example, most standardized reading comprehension tests consist of items designed to measure students' abilities on reading subskills, such as decoding, identifying main ideas, making inferences, determining the meaning of words from context, and deducing the author's tone. It is assumed that the measurements of these skills assess reading ability. Yet the basis for this assumption is not psycholinguistic or educational, but rather psychometric. The importance of these skills is derived from factor analyses of items on other reading tests. Thus, these skills assume their importance as indicators of reading proficiency from their being assessed on other well-established reading tests. However, nowhere is there a theoretical basis, other than factor analysis, for including these subskills as measurements of reading competency.

To construct tests that assess the learner's actual level of development, we must first work from our theories of reading and writing and speech toward a definition of what constitutes the reading process, the writing process, the process of oral communication.

With these measures of actual development as a starting point, we can begin to define ways of offering assistance to the test taker. For example, we could provide definitions of words, grammatical explanations, verb forms, background information, text structure information, assistance from peers--in short, whatever assistance we have to offer. The aim of such assistance should be to help the learner complete test items missed in the independent testing or to help him or her produce a final draft of a paper. We might even offer to solve items similar to those on the test so that the test taker could imitate us. After all, that is what the courses they will be attending will consist of: information and examples for exploration and imitation. Further, we would need to develop ways of classifying and tabulating the types and amounts of help given to test takers so that a uniform measure of assisted progress might be developed.

Implications of the Vygotskian Test for Teaching and Learning

It might, at first, appear that assistance would give us a false measure, that students might be able to imitate things they would not be able to do on their own for quite some time. However, if we remember some of our own attempts at following the explanations of professors in calculus classes, organic chemistry classes, Chinese classes, or automotive classes, we will soon realize that imitation tasks are closely related to what we can already do. Who among us could figure out the thrust and trajectory patterns needed to launch a spacecraft from simply watching an astrophysicist demonstrate how the pattern for a similar launch was calculated? Need we then worry that beginning level students might be able to imitate the action of reduced clauses following the verb "want" so long before they

would be able to produce such sentences on their own? No. The imitation tasks students can succeed in with our assistance are simply the tasks they have the necessary background to master, but for which they have not yet acquired the requisite skills.

Once we have these measures of the learners' actual and potential levels of development, individual zones of proximal development could be demarcated and used to place students in the appropriate courses. We would no longer simply group together students with similar independent abilities; rather, we would bring together those students who could benefit from the same type and level of instruction.

I know of no existing language test that has been devised using Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development as a measurement goal. However, such tests could help to give us the information we actually seek when we evaluate our students, make our placement procedures reflect something other than what often appears to have been serendipity, and enable us to provide students with the language instruction that will ultimately benefit them most.

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PERSON TO PERSON: STRUCTURED CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN ESL STUDENTS AND NATIVE SPEAKERS

CAROL MONTGOMERY

Because I teach an ESL course called Oral Communication and the Nonnative Speaker, I felt the need to devise a test of communicative competence. The inspiration and the methodology for the instrument I developed, tape-recorded conversations between the students and native English speakers, were drawn from Brown and Yule (1983), a useful guide to teaching and testing oral skills.

The approach of the course is essentially notional-functional. The syllabus consists of a list of social-cognitive functions adults typically need to perform in their everyday lives, along with some of the important features of conversation, such as openings, closings, turn-taking and topic nomination (Richards, 1980, pp. 413-34). Another component is pronunciation, with the emphasis on stress, rhythm, and intonation. The classroom texts are Jones and von Baeyer (1983) and Gilbert (1984).

For the evaluative test, students are required to tape-record four ten-minute conversations, each with a different native speaker of English, during the ten-week quarter. A different speaking task is carried out in each conversation. Brown and Yule have developed a taxonomy of speaking skills based on levels of difficulty. I chose the following four tasks--as much for their communicative usefulness as for their progressive levels of difficulty:

(1) Ask for useful information. A primary aim of ESL teachers is to help students use English to give and obtain information. In this task, students typically seek information concerning the College. I encourage them to ask about the majors they are contemplating or about student organizations that they may want to join.

(2) Relate a significant life experience. By telling about a meaningful experience, the student inevitably will produce a large chunk of language. Moreover, he or she will have practiced speaking at length.

(3) Share future plans and goals. This task is designed to encourage students to examine their career and life goals, preferably with someone who can provide guidance, such as a faculty member or counselor.

(4) Compare your native country and the United States, focusing on a single aspect of culture. The most difficult task, the fourth requires students to choose an aspect of culture that particularly interests them. They discuss

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topics related to such areas as education, family life, work, and recreation. Some specific topics have been teacher-student relationships, compliments, childbirth, pets, and punctuality. Because the topic selected is also the topic of the final classroom speech, students are asked to do background reading. For this conversation the student needs a partner with more specialized information--often a person with whom the student has had no previous contact.

When I introduce the project, I give the students a list of guidelines and discuss the following points in class:

(1) Who qualifies as a native speaker of English. For the first two conversations, I ask students to think of native speakers with whom they already feel comfortable. Teachers, tutors, classmates, and neighbors are logical choices.

(2) How to find suitable partners. Since I may have as many as sixty students altogether, I urge them to find their own partners, but offer to help students who are unable to do so.

(3) How to obtain a tape recorder if the student does not own one, how to label the tapes and the due date for each conversation.

(4) Important features of conversation. Initially, I make students aware of conversation as a specific, rule-governed genre of discourse. We talk about beginnings and endings and how to go about the assigned conversational task.

(5) The spontaneous nature of conversation. I know from experience that a few students will be tempted to read from a prepared "script"; so I remind them that this should be spontaneous speech and that I therefore expect to hear a good many errors. To further encourage natural interaction, I do not require that the entire conversation be devoted to the assigned task. Also, students are free to close the conversation, turn off the machine, and continue talking.

A student's performance is affected by the conversational style of the interlocutor. For this reason, I give the students a set of guidelines for the native speaker to read before the conversation begins. I explain the purposes of the project and ask the native speaker to

(1) try to speak in a normal fashion;
(2) be an interested listener;
(3) let the student know when an utterance is not fully understood, and ask for clarification or repetition as needed;
(4) ask questions about the content of the conversation;
(5) keep answers fairly short and let the student do at least 50% of the talking;
(6) try to keep the conversation centered on the assigned speaking task; and

(7) if time permits, finish the conversation when ten minutes are up and begin again.

Using the Foreign Service Rating Scale (Oller, 1979, and Brown & Yule, 1983) I evaluate each tape in the following six areas: (1) fluency, (2) listening comprehension, (3) clarity, (4) grammar, (5) vocabulary, and (6) information transfer.

In addition to assigning the numerical ratings, I write comments for the students relating to most of these areas. I fill out a separate sheet for each conversation to avoid being influenced by how well the student has done in previous conversations. Nevertheless, I find that my scoring of individual students is fairly consistent.

In a typical quarter, students average a gain of .64 points from the first to the fourth conversation. Many students do not show an even pattern of improvement from conversation to conversation. The greatest gain is usually made between the first and second conversation, as students become familiar with the project and overcome their self-consciousness in using the tape recorder. Perhaps another indication of student progress is the fact that the recorded conversations tend to become successively longer. And, I am always pleased when I hear the two conversationalists making plans for future meetings.

Having listened to almost 500 of these conversations, I believe that there is a developmental order in which the various features of conversation are mastered by second-language learners. All of the students are able to open and close their conversations using appropriate, idiomatic language. Most follow the opener with small talk, usually concerning the weather, a pattern which receives some emphasis in class. Fewer students know how to achieve smooth transitions between old and new topics, or how to elaborate on the topic at hand. Fewer still include the preclosings that occur at the end of a topic and which generally are signaled by an aphorism or a proverb.

This project entails some pitfalls, but a major one is the amount of time it takes to listen to and evaluate the tapes. As with most things, the time involved does decrease with experience. Yet, I find it difficult to listen to more than five or so conversations at one sitting, partly because most real-life conversations are quite uninteresting. When they exceed the ten-minute limit, I use the fast-forward button on my tape recorder and skip over some of the native speakers' utterances.

A second major problem is the variable effect of the native speakers on the results. There is considerable variation in the relationships the native speakers have with the students, their enthusiasm for the activity, and the extent to which they use "teacher talk" or "foreign talk." They all have idiosyncratic speech qualities--rate, volume, regional accent, grammatical patterns, register, vocabulary, and so on. In a few cases, a native speaker has conversed in a perfunctory manner or failed to keep the appointment. On occasion, students have been unable to sustain a "good" conversation with an interlocutor and have recorded another conversation with a more enthusiastic partner. I have made a list for future reference of colleagues who seem especially interested in helping foreign students

develop oral proficiency. The set of guidelines for the native speakers helps counteract some problems. However, the differences that remain make it difficult to evaluate students objectively. To date, I have not found adequate ways to take the role of the native speaker into account.

Nevertheless, I believe that there is sufficient value in the ESL-student/native speaker conversation project to continue implementing it. In addition to serving as an evaluative test, the project has proven to be a useful learning tool for the students and a teaching aid for me. It provides a vehicle for students to exploit their developing language skills in realistic situations. Although the situation is structured, it allows students to express their unique personalities and interests. It exposes them to various models of authentic, meaningful language and to several aspects of American culture. The controlled college setting is also an advantage: the students can anticipate at least some of the language to be used, and there is an above-average chance that the interlocutors will be sympathetic to the learners' linguistic needs.

Since students conduct a series of conversations, both teacher and students have a continuous record of the learners' spoken performance. Often, students feel that their progress in English is painfully slow. Their tapes can provide evidence of the strides they have made. They can become aware of language problems that interfere with communication, work on these areas, and improve their performance in subsequent conversations. They receive added practice by negotiating with prospective partners prior to the conversation and, on occasion, establish on-going relationships that will further aid the language-acquisition process.

As I listen to students' conversations, I keep a log for my own use. I record errors that show up frequently and note instances of skilled, sophisticated language use. I play excerpts in class from two or three of the tapes. I choose an example or two of miscommunication, and one or two of successful negotiation. I relate these to the work of students whose tapes are not played. Finally, the tape project helps me to personalize the teaching-learning experience. I note when a tape reveals that a student is experiencing difficulty in his or her personal life. I often learn that I share experiences or interests with particular students, which enhances my relationship with the class.

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A WRITER'S STRATEGY FOR TALKERS: THE ORAL JOURNAL

SALLY METTLER

Perhaps the biggest problem facing the teacher of a class in oral communication for the nonnative speaker of English is the fact that she is teaching a class. The class, by definition, is not composed of a single learner, motivated to improve or refine a single idiolect, but a couple of dozen learners with a wide range of experience in English and in life, across a spectrum of motivation moving from "No problem--I'm O.K. as I am," to "Transform me into a native speaker, and fast!" Add to this compound of experience and motivation the powerful variable of proficiency, and you arrive at a whole that is not the sum of its parts, but the product of many permutations and combinations. The teacher, then, has the complex task of identifying those features of language which everybody needs to understand and master, and those features of each student's interlanguage which that student needs to know about and focus on to make a perceptible change in the way s/he speaks English.

These larger issues of diagnostics, curriculum design, and individualized instruction converge in one practical question: If you've got a class hour in which to instruct a large group of people, have them utilize that instruction in real communication, and provide them with the feedback they need in order to move on, you may find that there aren't enough minutes in the hour to allow (let alone, inspire) all of your students to verbalize to their satisfaction, and yours. Small-group and dyadic work provide a partial solution: more opportunities for the learner to speak English, peer feedback that may help the speaker to become more globally fluent, but less likelihood of getting the focused response--that is the knowledgeable response of the teacher--that can bring about significant change.

No matter how well thought out the syllabus, and how well organized the activities of the class, the oral communication teacher still needs to find a way to listen to one voice at a time, to analyze one idiolect, and to respond to the substance (message) and style (image) of the speaker's discourse in ways that are communicative, analytical, and constructive. A step in the direction of one-to-one communication between teacher and learner can be taken by making the oral journal an ongoing activity for every student.

The oral journal is simply the sender's half of a dialogue. It is easy to construct: each student talks into a tape recorder for a few minutes at a time, at stipulated, regular intervals. The speaker never erases an entry, but rather accumulates his own talk on a cassette; the cassette is the journal. At regular intervals, the other party to the dialogue, the listener, collects the cassette-journals, listens to them in private and at leisure, and comments in writing to the absent speaker on both the "what" of each segment, its subject, and the "how" of

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it, those features of discourse and articulation which seem either admirable and in need of reinforcement, or questionable and in need of modification. Unlike classroom performances which are taped and then listened to jointly by the teacher and the student, journal entries are both created and responded to in private and without the formal valuation of a grade. They are a way for the student to both personalize and objectify oral English, and for the teacher to personalize and objectify critical response.

When I assign the oral journal, the student may choose to talk about anything, as long as it is in English. In getting underway, I suggest that entries be based on events of the day (at home, in school, in the community, in the world), on classwork (opinions, suggestions, requests for clarification or amplification), or, if there is no inclination to compose extemporaneously, that the entry be a reading: an intriguing item from any source (a newspaper, a literary work, a letter, even a textbook), followed by the speaker's impressions of the piece and a comment on why it engaged his attention.

Contemplating these options, students usually find the idea of speaking extemporaneously somewhat intimidating, and the prospect of reading aloud appealing. Getting ready to "just talk," the student wonders if what s/he has to say is of interest or importance to the listener, but these doubts seem to fall away as students discover that what they fear is trivial gets a specific and serious response from the listener. Reading aloud seems to be an easy task, because there is no need to compose. However, the act of reading aloud is problematic, and it often results in distorted articulation. Grouping another person's thoughts, making them intelligible to a third party (the listener), requires the speaker to have skills in comprehension and interpretation that are not needed in speaking spontaneously for oneself. Still, reading aloud does allow students to utter words that they are unlikely to come up with in ordinary talk, and thus to gain experience with the breadth of English, while the obligation to comment or editorialize after reading a passage encourages experience with the depth of the language. Combining a brief reading with a personal comment on the material is virtually the optimal use of the journal.

As a medium of response to the student journals, I came to devise a systematic format. In personal listening/discussing conferences with students, I use an Articulation Checklist, which is a simplified version of Prator and Robinett's Accent Inventory. As we listen to a tape together, I note on the checklist those phonological anomalies--consonant substitutions, extra vowels, and so forth--which need attention and practice. I confine myself to noting errors that damage intelligibility or are in some way stigmatizing. With advanced or highly motivated students, the checklist can be used for more subtle distinctions. At a later conference, we check the early notations, and comment on progress or the need for further work.

To respond regularly to the content and "style" of each journal, I've worked out a simple response diary in which my written comments are keyed to a student's taped entries by date and topic. This little diary goes back and forth with the cassette, and eventually remains with the student. The exchange between my entries and the student's entries creates a feedback loop that enhances the tenor of

the speaker's subsequent entries. As a quarter progresses and the taped journal becomes part of a student's routine, I have noticed that I become established as the unseen but present interlocutor. I am addressed by name as the speaker extemporizes. This affects me as I listen to a tape; hearing my name makes me feel even more inclined to respond in detail. The sense of audience seems to work on students' mode of discourse as well; utterances are less constrained, more daring in vocabulary choice, more varied in structures used. There is evidence of what one might call the paradox of fluency: more errors made, but in more complex discourse; more mispronunciations, but in more natural, comprehensible articulation.

In format, the oral journal is the simplest of pedagogical devices: a speaker with a tape recorder and no topical constraints. In execution, however, it is complex, even profound, as the following excerpt from an oral journal illustrates.

Excerpts from Lupe's Journal (Fall 1985)

October 2nd:

Today I fell very tired. I do not have so many things to say um I was all day in the school. I came home. I did the same from every day--cooking, attending my kids. Um I was try to read some paragraph of a novel to my dairy (sic). *The name of this novel is* Hunger of Memory: the Education of Richard Rodriguez.

> *"I remember to start with that day in Sacramento--a California now thirty years past--when I first entered a classroom, able to understand some fifty stray English words. . . . All my classmates certainly must have been uneasy on that first day of school . . . to find themselves apart from their families in the first institution of their lives. But I was astonished."*

(As she read, uttering aloud English words that she had understood but never said, Lupe revealed her problems with *-ed* endings, adding extra syllables to rebelled, returned, remained, with the initial *g* of geography, and with the initial *sh* of shopping, pronounced, predictably, as chopping. I had noted these features in her Articulation Checklist.)

October 3rd:

Today I feel so happy, because everyting that I did during the day um may me feel satisfied, because um the result of everyting what I did was O.K. For example, I has a test in my ENG class, writing No. 3, and I just got fi' errors--was in spelling and some uh verbs. That made me feel happy because um the quarter before I used to have more than fifteen, and I realize that I am doing better, that I am improving. Then/ng/, in my math class I feel very proud of me because I got good grades.

October 5th:

Ms. Mettler, I would like to introduce you my two sons. This is Cesar. Cesar is going to say some words to you.

Cesar (obviously reading a prepared communique): *My mother is very happy that you are teaching her. She um she is very excited to accomplish her course. She says you are a nice teacher. I hope you can succeed with her.*

Lupe: *Cesar, in what grade are you? Tell my teacher.*

Cesar: *Seven, mother dear.*

Lupe: *Now I am going to introduce you Abraham. He is my second son. He is nine years old. Cesar is twelve years old. But this is Abraham.*

Abraham: *I want to say that my mother is improving every day, and I think that you have been teaching her.*

Lupe: *You don't tell her hello.*

Abraham: *Hello.*

Lupe: *To Ms. Mettler.*

Abraham: *Hello, Ms. Mettler.*

(Noteworthy here is Lupe's use of the journal entry not only to forge a connection between her home and her schoolwork, but to introduce English into her family role. In her exchange with Abraham, she used English for admonition and instruction, two functions she normally performed in Spanish! Also, I had a chance to perceive that her sons are fluent, unaccented speakers of English who can help their mother to practice the language, a point I raised with Lupe in my response to this entry.)

Lupe: *O.K., Ms. Mettler. I feel like I am doing well, as my two children say. I try my best to improve in your course because I really need to get good grades, and I can pass all my courses and get out, get out the college soon. My wish is to go soon to work, and I feel useful in life. I mean in my society.*

(Lupe is using the present tense here, but I think she is really talking about the feeling she will have when she is out of school, and at work.)

October 6th:

I am going to read another paragraph from the same book that I estar to read on day 3 or 4, if I remember.

> *"When I was a boy, things were different. The accent of los gringos was never pleasing nor was it hard to hear. Crowds at Safeway or at bus stops would be noise with sound. And I would be forced to edge away from the chirping chatter above me. . . . I was unable to hear my own sounds, but I knew very well that I spoke English poorly. My words could not stretch far enough to form complete thoughts. And the words I did speak I didn't know well enough to make into distinct sounds. (Listeners would usually lower their heads, better to hear what I was trying to say.)"*

Well, Ms. Mettler, I think that the same this guy passed when he just came to this country happened to me. I feel like I. I don't know, well I can say I feel myself dumb, but I sometimes just because, because such a long time I have here, I been here, I came, I can express clear ideas.

(Here Lupe says *can say* and *can express*, but she means *can't:* the too-short vowels and the "amputated" final /t/ phonemes completely distort her intention. In reading, she had trouble with *chirping* and *thoughts*.)

> *Sometimes when I say something people look at me like they don't understand. I feel bad because I feel like I really don't learn anything. just a few words. Well, some, most of the time I understand what everybody say, well I can say almost all the time, but I can* (again, "can't") *express to them feedback clearly.*

(This entry shows the shift in register I mentioned. Lupe has become less correct, more confidential; the emotive component of her message makes itself felt.)

> October 7th:
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> *Today when I left the school I crossed the little bridge to Queens Boulevard and Queens Plaza. Most of the days of the week I do this, because I meet my sister over there. . . .*

It is unlikely that ordinary classroom activity, no matter how interactional in nature and design, would provide each student with an opportunity to discourse in this manner, and to get the individualized and private feedback that I am able to provide as a journal-listener. Orality and literacy come together in a natural, even inevitable way. Lupe speaks, I listen. I write, Lupe reads.

Each of us has a certain and attentive audience in the other. The oral journal equips me with enough information about Lupe to test my best powers of pedagogic invention; it provides Lupe with a forum in which to explore her life and the process of acculturation, as well as the English language. Ultimately, the oral journal makes possible what the classroom often obstructs: the one-to-one exchange between teacher and student which is the best definition of education.

THE CUNY ESL COUNCIL

The CUNY ESL Council was organized in 1974 by coordinators of ESL programs at The City University of New York to promote communication among the various units of the University and represent the interests of ESL faculty and students to College and University administrators. It serves as a forum for ESL faculty to discuss programs and policies of member units. The Council holds an annual conference, usually in February, on issues, theory, research, and practice related to ESL instruction. Membership is open to full-time and part-time CUNY faculty interested in the teaching of English as a second language.

THE INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

The Instructional Resource Center of The City University of New York (CUNY) was created by the Board of Higher Education in November 1974 to facilitate, organize, expand, and coordinate the basic skills resources of the seventeen undergraduate colleges of the University.

The Center seeks to identify effective program designs, significant curricular materials, and outstanding teachers; encourage collaborative efforts among the colleges; and share CUNY's basic skills experiences with educators outside the University. Since 1977, the Center has also served as an information channel for the CUNY Freshman Skills Assessment Program (FSAP), which tests incoming students and sets criteria for minimum competency in reading, writing, mathematics, and English as a second language.

As part of its dissemination program, the Center publishes a newsletter, *Resource;* reports and monographs; and annual publications on undergraduate mathematics, basic writing, and writing assessment, as well as selected papers from the CUNY ESL Council conferences. (Most current publications are available by mail order for a postage and handling charge of $2.00 each.)

The Center is a division of CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs and is under the direction of University Associate Dean Harvey S. Wiener. Its projects are coordinated by Virginia B. Slaughter.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

about the CUNY ESL Council, or for a list/order form of Instructional Resource Center publications, please write to The Instructional Resource Center, Office of Academic Affairs, The City University of New York, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.